

Palau National Invasive Species Committee

DRAFT Meeting Minutes



Meeting: 2015-01
Date: January 20, 2015
Time: 2:00 – 4:00 pm
Venue: EQPB Conference Room

Attendance:

Present:

Fred Sengebau, Chair	BOA
Joel Miles, Secretary	BOA
Yalap Yalap	PCS
Francesca Sungino	EQPB
Percy Rechelluul	BMR
Brenda Santos	DFWP
Charlene Mersai	OERC
Oshiro Lorin	DEH

Absent:

Attorney General's Office (EQPB legal counsel)
Customs
CRRF

Guests:

Lesley Vick	Micronesia Challenge
Isechal Remengesau	PAN Office

• Call to Order/Adopt Agenda

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:11 pm. The agenda was adopted as presented by the Coordinator (version 2)

• Announcements

• PAN Invasive Species Staff – Coordinator

Joel introduced the new Fire Prevention and Invasive Species Coordinator, Mr. Isechal Remengesau. Isechal began work at the beginning of January, in the PAN Office. Joel is mentoring him on terrestrial invasive species, mostly plants; he will work with Julian Dendy and Dino Mesubed on fire mapping and prevention.

• School Outreach has begun – Joel and Yalap announced that they have begun school outreach visits to 5th graders in all elementary schools, with the focus on invasive species threats to wetlands (World Wetlands Day is February 2). As of today, they have visited 4 schools. Isechal is accompanying them, and will do a portion of the presentation on invasive species threats to wetlands. They are also announcing the essay contest for Invasive Species Awareness Day on February 25, and distributing information about the contest.

• Pacific Islands Forestry Committee (PIFC) Meeting – Joel announced that this meeting will be held in Yap the first week of March, and one of the topics will be invasive species threats to forests. Joel has been invited to give a presentation on regional cooperation to combat invasive

species; the USFS will pay his airfare to the meeting; he is looking for funding for per diem. Isechal is also planning to attend this meeting.

- **Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)** – Joel announced that arrangements are being made for a RISC meeting the week following the PIFC meeting, to be held in Guam. Joel will attend, as the Secretary of RISC; Isechal may also attend if he has sufficient funding support.
- **Field Guide to Invasive Plants** – Joel announced that he has completed a draft field guide to 20 of the most important invasive plant threats to terrestrial protected areas in Palau. He is working with Ann Kitalong of the Belau National Museum on this. Ann has funding for design and layout and to produce a pdf copy; they are looking for funds to print at least 100 copies for distribution to PAN Coordinators and others.
- **Rock Islands Tour Guide Manual** – Joel announced that he has completed a draft section on invasive species for the new tour guide manual for the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon conservation area. This was at the request of the team developing the manual. He is not sure of the timing for publication of the manual and training for tour guides. Members requested that Joel send the draft to them for comments – he will do so.
- **Vietnamese Fishing Boats** – Oshiro informed the NISC that DEH found a lot of sign of rats on the Vietnamese fishing boats caught illegally fishing in Palau waters. There was also a lot of sign of rats and cockroaches on the Chinese casino/floating hotel (described as “filthy”). DEH has submitted their report on this, but they have not been asked to take any action

- **Reports**

- **Forest Health Monitoring Training Nov 17-21** – Joel
Joel briefly reported that he assisted with this training, organized by PCS, giving instruction on monitoring forests for invasive species and their impacts.

- **Updates**

- **Macaque Removal Initiative** – Joel
Joel informed the NISC that the newly elected Governor of Angaur, Marvin Ngirutang, has been sworn in, but has not yet had his inauguration. Governor Ngirutang has formed a transition committee, and Joel met with one of the co-chairs of the committee, Jonatus Misech, in December to provide background and a status report on the initiative. He had hoped to meet with the entire committee, but he has not been able to arrange this. He has also been trying to meet with Governor Ngirutang, but he has not yet been able to arrange this either.

Joel also informed the NISC that the Challenge Grant – an offer of \$100,000 for completing the development of eradication methods – will expire on February 28, unless the Republic comes up with \$100,000 to match this amount. This grant has been available since October 2013, but we have not been able to get the funds to match it. It appears that the main reason why this challenge has not been met is due to opposition by the Angaur Delegate to the House of Delegates, Mario Gulibert. Joel has repeatedly offered to meet with Delegate Gulibert to discuss the project, but has not been able to arrange a meeting. Joel discussed this with Minister Sengebau a couple of weeks ago, and Minister Sengebau said he would meet with Minister Gulibert and Governor Ngirutang to discuss this. Minister Sengebau pointed out that such a project cannot succeed without strong support from the Delegate and Governor, as well as other elected and traditional leaders of Angaur. Joel fully agrees with this assessment.

Joel reminded the NISC that the NGO Island Conservation has been paying half of his salary since the end of 2012, to support his work toward macaque removal. If the Challenge Grant is

not met, Island Conservation will no longer be able to provide this funding; another source of funds will need to be found to pay Joel's salary. The NISC tasked its Chair to follow up on this with Minister Sengebau, and tasked him and Joel to look into other sources of funding so that he can continue to work.

- **Invasive Species Awareness Day (ISAD)** – Ad-hoc committee (Joel, Lesley, Percy, Yalap) Committee members informed the NISC that arrangements are progressing well for this day. There will be three awards: Business Leader; Community Hero; and Greatest Hit of 2014. There will also be an essay contest for two groups: 5th-8th graders; and high school students. The winners will get to read their essays at the President's press conference on Feb 25. Awards will also be presented on that day, and the President will sign a proclamation declaring February 25 as Invasive Species Awareness Day. The committee wants to print 500 towels with the theme of the day: Invasive Species are Everyone's Responsibility/A Invasive Species a Ngercheled el Rokui. Approximately \$2500 is needed, and there was discussion of how to raise these funds. The NISC agreed that the Chair will approach Angaur Governor Ngirutang's Chief of Staff, Ken Uyehara, to see if Angaur would like to sponsor the Day, and assist with fundraising for towels, publicity, and other costs. Joel will also continue to look for other sources of funding.

Yalap's PCS radio talk show will feature invasive species for the four Tuesdays in February leading up to ISAD. After discussion the NISC agreed on the following sequence:

February 3 – States/community representatives (3 or 4)
February 10 – Quarantine and Customs
February 17 – PAN Office and PAN site coordinators (3 or 4)
February 24 – NISC Chair, with DFWP and BMR reps

Several suggestions were made to Yalap for guests for February 3; Yalap will do the inviting.

Joel reminded the NISC that judging of the essays will be on February 18, at the BOA Office in Ngchesar. **All NISC members are needed for this judging** – please mark your calendar. Joel will send a reminder a week in advance.

- **Biosecurity Bill Status** – Chair
The Chair reported that this bill is being considered by the Senate in the current session. He has been asked to comment, as Director of BOA and Chair of NISC. Joel has drafted a letter with the suggestions developed by the NISC last year; he will provide this draft to the Chair for him to finalize and send to the Senate.
- **X-ray machine donation** – Chair and Joel
Joel has been communicating with the person who arranged shipping, setup, and training for a similar donation to Guam Customs last year. Joel is now waiting for him to send an estimate of the cost. The NISC tasked Joel to write to this person to follow up. Joel will do that this week.
- **Kayangel CRB Status and Plans** – Joel
Joel reported that his planned trip to Kayangel had to be postponed; He was hoping to go in February, but he may not be able to go due to ISAD and other activities. He will continue to work with Kayangel conservation staff to arrange this trip, to begin monitoring CRB population and damage to coconut trees. He will also conduct a survey for invasive plants on all four islands of Kayangel atoll, with the assistance of Ann Kitalong of the Belau National Museum.
- **Eurasian Tree Sparrows – a health issue?** – DEH
Oshiro reported that at this time DEH is focusing all its energies on rats and mosquitoes, and they do not have sufficient resources to address the sparrows as well. Joel added that he has

received some additional information from SPC; this has been shared with DEH and the new epidemiologist at MOH, Dmang Udui. DEH Chief Eden Uchel has told Joel she will wait for advice from Ms. Udui. In the meantime, Jan Vick has worked with Trebkul Tellei at the BOA office to build and test a sparrow trap at the Ngchesar BOA office – so far they have caught only rats, and they are still working on the design.

- **White Shrimp** – This was not on the agenda, but a member asked, and the Chair informed the NISC that the farmed shrimp were moved to an inland pond, and should all have been harvested by now. He also noted that he has received a report of a Chinese restaurant selling live shrimp, and he has assigned Quarantine officers to investigate this.
- **GEF 6 Project** – Joel
Joel reported that Minister Sengebau has sent a letter to his counterparts in the FSM and RMI, inviting them to join Palau in a Micronesia-wide project to implement the Regional Biosecurity Plan, strengthen prevention and control of invasive species in protected areas through the Micronesia Challenge, and for local control and/or eradication projects. We are now waiting for their response, and hoping that it will be positive.

Charlene added that Palau will soon have a National Planning Meeting to set priorities for GEF 6 funding; FSM and RMI will have similar meetings to set their own priorities. She added that the President asked the Cabinet this morning to move this process forward. OERC will organize the national planning meeting.

- **Praxelis Control in Ngeremlengui** – Joel
Joel reported that he and a team from Forestry pulled almost 10,000 plants from the site on the Compact Road earlier this month. He believes that if they can do this every two months, they can completely eradicate this plant by the end of 2015. The key is being consistent about pulling all plants before they can flower and produce seeds, which takes about 3 months. The math is scary: one plant can produce over 100 seeds in about 3 months' time: so in 6 months, there could be 10,000 plants, and in 9 months 1 million plants! (check my math to be sure)
- **Tilapia** – Joel
Joel has not had an update on this, but he has heard that the Palau National Quarry at Malakal has been sold to Chinese investors for a hotel site. Joel will follow up on this with Melwert Tmetuchl and make sure that the pond is filled before the site changes hands.
- **Others**
 - **Chinese Casino/Floating Hotel** – at the Chair's request, Dr. Pat Colin of CRRF inspected the hull of this ship below water. Dr. Colin informed us that he did not see any species of immediate concern, but noted that the hull is very rusty and could spring one or more leaks at any time.
 - **Invasive Species in Protected Areas – criteria for management plans** – Joel and Lesley have been working on this. They informed the NISC that they have met with King Sam of the PAN Office, and Lesley also shared the draft criteria with the PAN Technical Committee, and received a positive response. Lesley and Joel will finalize these for adoption by the PAN Office.
 - **NISC Annual Report** – Joel informed the NISC that this should be completed by the end of February. He will begin drafting it, and he asked the rest of the NISC for input. NISC members promised to respond.
- **Date for next meeting** – the next regular meeting will be held on March 17, 2015, at the usual time and place (2-4 pm, EQPB Conference Room). (This is St. Patrick's Day – be sure to wear green)
- **Adjourn** – The meeting was adjourned at 4:33 pm, after the Chair thanked EQPB for hosting the meeting.